

## International Engagement: One (Continuous) Step at a Time

*There will always be surprising events in this interconnected world in which we live, but if we remain focused on engaging and maintaining sustained relations with our international colleagues, these events might not be as unexpected, astonishing, or surprising!*

Rear Admiral Jeffrey A. Harley  
President, United States Naval War College

### Engagement by Design

The importance of the U.S. Navy's approach to international engagement is one of the four "lines of effort" in the Chief of Naval Operations' *A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority*.<sup>1</sup> The challenge, in conjunction with the U.S. Navy's *Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower*,<sup>2</sup> is to "prioritize key international partnerships through information sharing, interoperability initiatives, and combined operations," as well as explore "new opportunities for combined forward operations." The focus on – and improvement of – combined operations and interoperability, however, cannot be accomplished "on the fly" or without a long-term program. *Successful naval operations begin long before individuals from different navies talk on bridge-to-bridge radio, or even meet at pre-planning conferences.* This interaction extends far beyond the horizon of the senior officer level, and the tactical or operational levels of warfare.

The U.S. Navy's international engagement efforts encompass a

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<sup>1</sup> Admiral John Richardson, U.S. Navy, "A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority," version 1.0, January 2016, 6.  
[http://www.navy.mil/cno/docs/cno\\_stg.pdf](http://www.navy.mil/cno/docs/cno_stg.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Coast Guard, "A Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower," March 2016.  
<http://www.navy.mil/local/maritime/CS21R-Japanese.pdf>.

wide variety of programs from Midshipmen, enlisted, and junior officer ranks, to senior officers, and continues Admiral Mullen's conceptual *Thousand Ship Navy*.<sup>3</sup> These programs focus on a multitude of ways and means to engage around the world, including travel, policy, planning, conferences, education, port calls and exercises to engage country-to-country and navy-to-navy. Just as important to building long-term official relationships, however, are the personal relationships formed during these engagements. *Official interactions by themselves do not necessarily create the synergies for which engagement is undertaken, rather the personal relationships formed during official interactions become the starting point for sustained relationship building.*

International engagement is also an important part of the U.S. Navy's focus on Forward Presence, the purpose of which is to demonstrate national resolve, support and influence diplomacy – and if necessary – project power. Such actions cannot take place in a vacuum, but are reinforced by long-term official and personal relationships. The first time a U.S. Navy ship needs to pull into a port for emergency repairs should not be the first time the Navy deals with the host country.

*At the U.S. Naval War College, international engagement is one of our most important missions. We educate our students – both U.S. and international – to learn, lead, and adapt in order to achieve maximum possible performance, as well as maintain high standards required for short-notice operations and combat. What with the constantly changing geopolitical and military landscape – and with the evolving impact of new science and technology – international engagement will remain a continual process.*

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<sup>3</sup> Ronald E. Ratliff, "Building Partners' Capacity – The Thousand-Ship Navy," *Naval War College Review*, Autumn 2007, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a519224.pdf>.

## **U.S. Naval War College's International Program**

Since creating the Naval Command College for senior international officers in 1956 and the Naval Staff College for intermediate-level international officers in 1972, both graduate-level programs have graduated close to 4500 officers from 129 countries. Of those, 1314 were subsequently promoted to Flag rank, and 336 served as their respective Head of Service or Chief of Naval Operations-equivalent. Today, 37 U.S. Naval War College international graduates are serving as Head of their nation's Navy or Coast Guard.

Officers in our International Colleges benefit from a vigorous "Field Studies Program" which involves travel to show how the United States functions in all respects, including democratic ideals of elected government, internationally recognized human rights, free enterprise and industry, judicial system, diversity of society, freedom of the press, actions by political parties and interest groups, media and civil-military relations. This whole of society and government approach to educating our international partners is designed to give them a fuller appreciation of the United States that fully informs in any future interactions they have with our Navy or government.

Both colleges provide a superb forum in which to build trust and confidence, and foster enduring professional and personal friendships. Our international alumni interact daily to resolve crises peacefully, when possible, and they work together as a coalition team on myriad challenges across the full spectrum of military operations when events dictate. For many years a story has persisted of two naval officers – one from India and the other from Pakistan – who befriended one another while attending the U.S. Naval War College. The two reportedly maintained a close personal relationship after graduation, and on occasion when their two countries came close to war, the two leaders, because of their

close personal relationship, were able to communicate with one another and avert war by conducting the “Track II” diplomacy<sup>4</sup> which official diplomats could not. While this particular story may be a myth, many former senior officers from India and Pakistan, as well as other countries with conflicting perspectives, established close personal relationships while studying together here at the U.S. Naval War College. In the current international operating environment – with increasing tensions between countries – this anecdote is worth preserving for the sake of its enduring lessons.

### **Continuous Steps Forward**

*Successful international engagement is not something one can turn on or turn off on a whim.* It takes years, and sometimes decades, to build strong relationships. Toward that end, the U.S. Naval War College currently hosts three Chief of Naval Operations Distinguished International Fellows – Admiral Tomoshisa Takei (Japan), Admiral Guillermo Barrera (Colombia), and Admiral Nirmal Verma (India) – all U.S. Naval War College alumni who retired after serving as their respective nation’s Head of Navy. As we grow this program to include a Distinguished Fellow from each region of the world, we will be bringing in more retired Heads of Navy to our faculty.

The U.S. Naval War College also maintains special relationships with allies, and has hosted a senior JMSDF officer in our International Programs office for several years. And through a relationship between myself and the President of Japan’s Maritime Command and Staff College, we are also extending, expanding, and exchanging personnel in the areas of maritime law, history, and future studies.

In March we also hosted our 14<sup>th</sup> Regional Alumni Symposium

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Homans, “Track II Diplomacy: A Short History,” *Foreign Policy*, June 20, 2011, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/06/20/track-ii-diplomacy-a-short-history/>.

in Lima, Peru.<sup>5</sup> The U.S. Naval War College holds two to three of these events each year around the world in order to maintain the strong personal bonds necessary for a combined approach to maritime security. This autumn we will be hosting the 15<sup>th</sup> Regional Alumni Symposium in the Middle East.

Almost a year ago, the 22<sup>nd</sup> International Seapower Symposium was held in Newport, RI.<sup>6</sup> Chief of Naval Operations Admiral John Richardson participated with senior officers and Heads of Navies/Coast Guards from 105 countries. In the largest gathering of maritime leaders in history, they discussed the rapid pace of change in the maritime and naval realms, and how to strengthen our maritime partnerships. This biennial event was first held at the U.S. Naval War College in 1969 to allow naval leaders from around the world to meet and discuss common issues, and ultimately find solutions for them.

Faculty and staff from across the many departments of the U.S. Naval War College are constantly collaborating with colleagues around the world to extend our international relationships. We have a constant stream of professionals traveling to Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and other points around the globe to attend conferences, symposia, workshops, seminars and other international events hosted by governments, militaries, agencies, and think tanks.

Next year, we will add a new program to our international lineup. As an extension to our already successful Maritime Staff Operators Course (MSOC) for U.S. students, beginning in January

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Naval War College Public Affairs, “US Naval War College Strengthens Latin America, Caribbean Partnerships,” U.S. Naval War College, March 21, 2017,

<https://www.usnwc.edu/About/News/March-2017/US-Naval-War-College-strengthens-Latin-America.-Ca.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Naval War College, “International Seapower Symposium – Report of the Proceedings,” February 2017, <https://www.usnwc.edu/getattachment/8549c1d3-61cd-4e7b-ac1e-630ba5000bc7/ISS-22-Proceedings.aspx>.

2018 we will offer an International Maritime Staff Operators Course (I-MSOC).<sup>7</sup> This 12-week course will provide international naval officers the knowledge and skills needed to support the planning and execution of maritime operations, and integrate with existing operational planning teams from other countries.

## Conclusion

For centuries, sailors the world over have shared a bond with the sea. The challenge now is to use the foundation of international naval engagement – built over many decades – not just to maintain, but to improve the chances for international peace and security. We must strive not just to know one another, but to understand one another. We must define our relationships in order that our perceived relationships don't define us.

The world has progressed too far and has become too small for countries to ignore one another. Modern technology allows time and space to collapse to the point where information can be shared instantaneously around the world, and goods can be shipped anywhere within hours. In a world so small, not only can nations and navies not afford to ignore one another, individuals must strive to know and understand one another from the national/strategic level all the way down to the personal level. The U.S. Naval War College is committed to building this network of strategic, operational and personal bridges across the international maritime domain.

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Naval War College, "International Maritime Staff Operators Course," <https://www.usnwc.edu/Departments---Colleges/International-Programs/I-MSOC-Overview.aspx>.